

REVIEW and OUTLOOK

CPYRGHT

Letter of Marque

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The shades of all adventurers must be stirring happily over the letter a kindred non-conformist spirit has mailed to Washington, D.C.

Mr. Lyle H. Munson is tired of waiting for the Americans held captive overseas to be released through diplomatic overtures. He has asked Congress to grant him a letter of marque and reprisal, a system of commissioning privateers used to stamp out piracy in our early history. Mr. Munson claims that when Americans are held for diplomatic ransom—as they are now being held in East Germany and by Fidel Castro's Cuban rebels—the captors who hold them are nothing but out-and-out pirates.

A former cloak-and-dagger operative for the wartime Office of Strategic Services and the Central Intelligence Agency, Mr. Munson says he doesn't need a full-rigged ship to do the job the old-time privateers did, either. He can do it with a plane, a helicopter or maybe a PT boat. His plan is to go in and get the Americans out, as Robin Hood stormed the Sheriff of Nottingham's castle and the Scarlet Pimpernel spirited nobles out of the shadow of the French Revolution's guillotine.

Why the letter of marque? Well,

Mr. Munson figures that before he can get the men out of East German and Cuban rebel jails he must first get himself out of the U.S.A. And without some such authority, he would have to take on the passport division of the State Department, the immigration service and maybe even the F.B.I. to get going. He's got lots of offers of men and money to do the job, he says; all he needs is permission.

Naturally, nothing will come of all this except perhaps to stir Washington to a little more diplomatic endeavor on behalf of the captives—which is about all we can do. The days of such ultimatums as Teddy Roosevelt's "Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead" just won't work any more. There is too much at stake for anything but the most careful and precise diplomacy.

Still, we must admit that Mr. Munson's got something quite catchy in his request for a letter of marque and reprisal. It has an adventurous air, a smell of salt spray, a look of Hawkins and Frobisher and Drake about it that is particularly appealing in this age of conformity.

Mr. Munson won't get his letter of marque and it's best that he doesn't. But if Congress only dared, and we were only younger. . . .